

Counselling and psychotherapy – hierarchies, epistemicide and bad medicine.

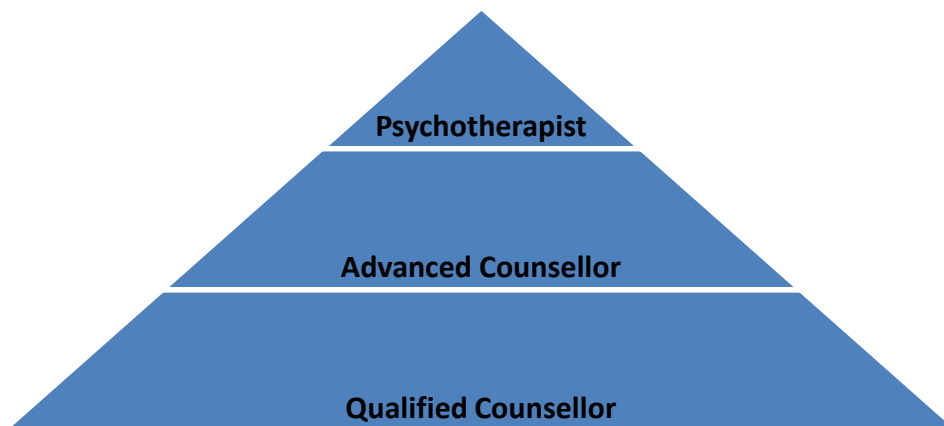
Cemil Egeli

There are shockwaves being felt around the counselling and psychotherapy worlds as The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) along with the British Psychoanalytic Council (BPC) and the United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP) are collaborating on The Scope of Practice and Education for the counselling and psychotherapy professions (SCoPEd) project in which they are seeking to differentiate counselling and psychotherapy through a competence framework (BACP, 2019).

It proposes a divisive three tier system of qualified counsellor, advanced counsellor and psychotherapist stating that there is no evidence to show “that counsellors have skills and knowledge that psychotherapists do not have” (BACP et al, 2018). This harmful assumption places psychotherapists in a superior position on the SCoPEd continuum. This is misinformation and does not represent the experience, skills and knowledge of counsellors. It promotes divisions between counselling and psychotherapy and contradicts what the BACP argued in 2009, (Gabriel, Clarke and Aldrige, 2009).

The data SCoPEd have presented is hierarchical, paternalistic and infantilises counsellors whilst denying their autonomy as practitioners. In my experience, counsellor training was developmental, part of a lifelong learning journey and about becoming a person (Rogers,1967). In this sense, SCoPEd is an attack on my personhood not just my job description. As a person of mixed culture I find it unnerving that three organisations with either the title “British” or “United Kingdom” in their names can tell me through SCoPEd, what they think my competence in working with difference, stereotyping and discrimination is. SCoPEd is an act of oppression on many levels.

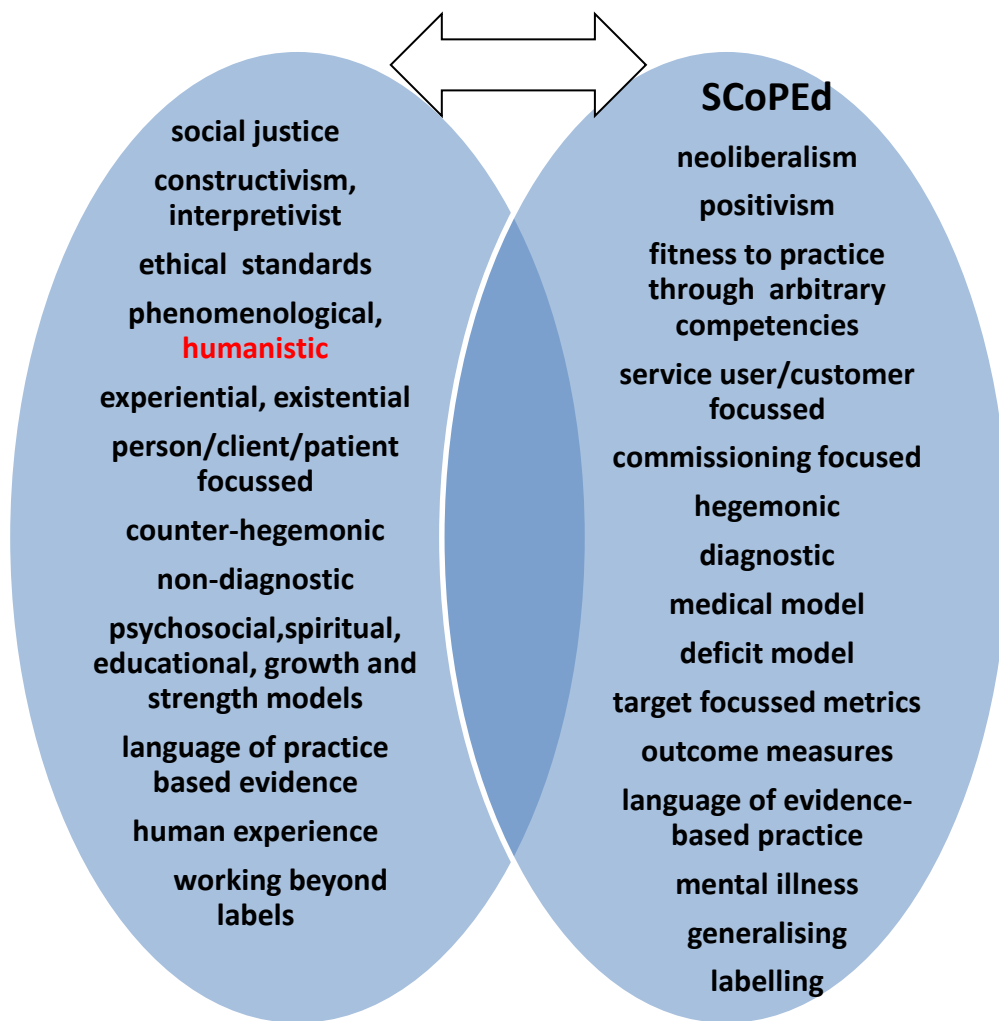
As it is currently mapped, SCoPEd suggests a pyramidal hierarchy among the roles:



(SCoPEd hierarchical pyramid)

Tellingly, the Roth and Pilling (2008) methodology used, was also used to identify competencies for the Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) programme. The positivist nature of the methodology is at odds with the experiential nature of the vocations. As a piece of smash and grab research it fails to capture the complexities and nuances of our roles. It reduces counselling and psychotherapy to a set of arbitrary competencies where for example, the ability to work with unconscious processes becomes a box ticking exercise, which is absurd. SCoPEd seems to be playing an IAPT game by creating crude, mechanistic and medicalised definitions of our work. It appears the membership bodies are carving up counselling and psychotherapy in a vain attempt to make us saleable to the NHS (and perhaps others).

SCoPEd is representative of a wider hegemonic, neoliberal and dehumanising agenda which threatens to run roughshod over the principles of the therapeutic work we do. The political tensions across the vocations could loosely be represented in this way:



Tensions across counselling and psychotherapy

It is clear that an analytical, medical, generalised and deficit view of humanity is what is valued in the SCoPed hierarchy. This is an act of epistemicide against the more humanistic, phenomenological, existential or spiritual aspects of our work. SCoPed labels practitioners but in so doing also pathologises clients. What they describe as working with mental health is given precedence over human experiencing. The SCoPed mapping states they are showing the current state of play yet in the way it is using and (mis)-representing the data, it is changing the state of play in itself.

The BACP (2019a) claim that they influence decision makers and aim to improve public protection. SCoPed serves rather than influences the decision makers and colludes directly with the hegemonic structures which cause so much anxiety and alienation for clients. It potentially harms rather than protects the public.

Counselling and psychotherapy has to be able to set itself aside from the hegemony and be able to operate from and within marginal spaces. The attendants to the soul are about to sacrifice the soul of their work at the altar of commissioning bodies. It seems as if the newly elevated psychotherapists are about to masquerade as medical scientists in order to try to secure NHS employment. This would be little more than quackery or bad medicine.

Counselling is at risk. It may even have to be re-invented and re-emerge under a new name. After all, do clients really care what a helpful person calls themselves?

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